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PROGRESSIVISM IN INDUSTRY: THE WELFARE MOVEMENT IN THE AMERICAN FACTORY

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In the last five years the historiography of progressivism has taken an important turn. The point of focus has shifted from middle-class, status-motivated reformers to the businessmen. Gabriel Kolko in *The Triumph of Conservatism* and Robert Wiebe in *Businessmen and Reform* have demonstrated that the historian who seeks to characterize a period must locate its center of power.¹ This generation of American historians owes more than a passing debt to C. Wright Mills, who dramatically instructed his fellow intellectuals on the meaning of power. In this paper I accept the premise that power, as represented by business, is the key to the understanding of American society in this period. This paper concentrates on the businessman's role within industry rather than in politics. Through this approach I hope to question and modify some of the conclusions reached by Kolko, who characterizes the period as one dominated by conservative businessmen, and Wiebe, who admits the businessmen into progressivism only because they supported federal regulation.

This study is an examination of the employer welfare movement in the American factory, a movement which began in the last years of the nineteenth century and flourished until shortly before the United States' entry into World War I. Chronologically, and in the use of the term "welfare", there is a suggestion of its link to progressivism. I will attempt to show that in its ideological conception, material motivation, personnel, and even in the nature of its weaknesses the employer welfare movement constituted an integral part of progressivism.

Employer welfare work, or industrial betterment as it was also termed, was a loosely conceived field that one expert defined as "any effort on the part of the employer to better the conditions under which the employees work." He supplemented this general definition with five descriptive headings: sanitary work places, recreation, education, housing, and provident funds.² A more comprehensive list compiled by a Labor Department investigator in 1900 included: workingmen's

¹ Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Robert Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

² Gertrude Beeks, *Industrial Betterment Work* (Address before the General Federation of Women's Clubs, Los Angeles, Calif., May 6, 1902), pamphlet; Gertrude Beeks, *Welfare Work* (An Address Before the National Association of Wool Manufacturers, Boston, Feb. 7, 1906), pamphlet.

clubs, physical culture, education, industrial training, religious work, music, social gatherings, profit sharing, stock purchase plans, domestic education, health (bathing facilities and lunch rooms), insurance and beneficial organizations, savings plans, financial aid, and the general promotion of close relations between employer and employee.³

Employer welfare work was then a broad-ranged program, adopted without legal compulsion, to improve the non-mechanical aspects of factory life. It flourished in the United States from 1897 to the eve of World War I. During these years a host of new ideas and some refurbished old ones subsumed under the name of welfare were grasped by many employers and introduced in their firms. It marked the recognition that the corporation's concern for the worker extended far beyond the narrow boundaries of the productive process into the wider area of his physical and social well-being, and in this process stimulated the transformation of the corporation from solely an economic institution into the basic social unit of American society.

Men of the cloth were in the front rank of those sensing a need for change in the conditions of labor. Progressive churchmen considered the industrial conditions of the late nineteenth century to be an ever-widening stain on American civilization. While their fathers in the ministerial profession had accepted the *laissez-faire* ethic, the sons had a broader sense of responsibility and through the social gospel movement they hoped to reform the existing system. Some few radicals in the social gospel movement opted for socialism and the left wing of the labor movement, but the majority were moderates who chose to work for class conciliation and to instill a new social consciousness in the minds of the American industrial élite.⁴

Reverend Josiah Strong, a Congregational minister, was one of the prominent leaders among the moderates. He first gained renown with the publication of *Our Country* in 1885. Strong was asked to revise a manual of the Congregational Home Missionary Society but his work turned out to be much more than the mere revision of a theological handbook. It was a major declaration of the ideas and ideals of social Christianity.⁵

Intemperance, Urbanization, Romanism, Mormonism, Mammonism, and Socialism were the major evils Strong saw in American life, and he

³ Victor H. Olmstead, *The Betterment of Industrial Conditions* (Washington: Bulletin of the Department of Labor, No. 31, 1900), pp. 1117-8.

⁴ Charles H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), is the pioneer work on the social gospel. Cf. Henry F. May, *The Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper, 1949).

⁵ John Haynes Holmes, "Josiah Strong," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XVIII, 150-151. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: The American Home Missionary Society, 1885).

believed the only way to fight them was through the development of a new concept of Christianity based on a revised conception of property. Every man, said Strong, must realize that God had a right not only to the traditional tithe, but to all His wealth. This conception made it possible to enlist wealth and property in the cause of social service. It directed property to social uses without adopting socialism.

Strong aimed his message at the men of property, those who had the material means and power to promote benevolent works. Using what would become a most common metaphor, Strong contended that the United States had developed a "republican feudalism", but one in which the new barons exercised "more power and less responsibility than many an olden feudal lord." Political reform could no longer placate the discontented, for its limits had been reached with the attainment of universal manhood suffrage. The new sphere for reform was in industry. In this situation, he said, "most Christian men need to discover that they are not proprietors, apportioning their own, but simply trustees or managers of God's property."⁶ A new chivalric code, a new sense of responsibility was required for the new feudalism and, Strong believed, the task of the reform clergy was to create a climate of public opinion that would favor the development of these new ideas.

Strong failed in his efforts to transform the Congregational Home Missionary Society into a vehicle for his social efforts and in 1898 established his own League for Social Service, which was reorganized four years later as the American Institute of Social Service. Under the leadership of Strong and William Howe Tolman, a former relief worker among New York's poor, this organization took an active role in promoting employer welfare work in the United States.⁷

Strong called his institute a "clearing house of experience in social and industrial betterment." Its task was to gather from all countries the results of their experience in employer welfare work and make them available to Americans and especially to those in a position to act on the information. He hoped that this accumulation of material would aid in the development of a true science of sociology, the basis of which would be the recognition of the "oneness of society" and the appreciation of the fact that, as Strong put it, "the members of society are members one of another and that its various organs are interdependent."⁸ This organic or corporate approach to society was not peculiar to Strong but was shared in one form or another by most of those who adhered to the social gospel.

⁶ Strong, *Our Country*, pp. 106, 111, 183.

⁷ Holmes, "Josiah Strong," *DAB*, pp. 150-151.

⁸ Josiah Strong, "What Social Service Means: A Clearing House of Experience in Social and Industrial Betterment," *The Craftsman*, IX (Feb. 1906), 620-33.

Moderate spokesmen of the social gospel rejected the competitive outlook of *laissez-faire* and the even more grotesque social Darwinist position. They sensed that their country was undergoing a crisis in which older American communities were being shattered and nothing put in their place. Intemperance, Romanism, and Socialism were symptomatic of the breakdown of the traditional community and its values, and in this situation Protestant churches faced the challenge of providing a new theology which would overcome the disintegrative forces of industrialism and lay the basis for a new social unity.

The concept of the organic unity of mankind may have been borrowed from such medieval scholars as Thomas Aquinas or John of Salisbury. As theology, it was nothing new. It restored God as the unifying force in social relations as well as in the natural universe. He is, said Shailer Mathews, "a God who is always with us." "Religion," said Mathews, "is social as well as individualistic," and "from the union of lives alone there can result safety and peace." Mathews and the other social gospellers thus hoped to unify a world they believed to be essentially at odds with itself. For, said Mathews, "to make men Christians is to make society unified."⁹

Moderate proponents of the social gospel fixed on Strong's central assumption that capitalism had to be dealt with in realistic rather than utopian terms. Nicolas Paine Gilman, Unitarian clergyman and one of the earliest writers on industrial betterment, had "a profound conviction that a true and natural aristocracy—the leadership of the competent—is to endure in the industrial world, as elsewhere, for an indefinite time."¹⁰ His former co-worker, Carroll D. Wright, the United States Commissioner of Labor, put it more succinctly, saying, "the employer is something more than a producer: he is an instrument of God for the upbuilding of the race."¹¹ These reformers based their tactics on an *élite*ist approach, but in so doing they remained within one of the traditional approaches of American reform. Their role was that of educators, not crusaders.

The intensive and extensive propagation of industrial betterment in the United States began in the last two years of the nineteenth century. Strong's Institute began operations in 1898 and a year later Gilman published the first comprehensive book on industrial betterment.¹² Strong's "clearing house of experience" attempted to reach the employers and the public by several methods. It published an irregular news-

⁹ Shailer Mathews, "The Christian Church and Social Unity," *American Journal of Sociology*, V (Jan. 1900), 456-469.

¹⁰ Nicholas P. Gilman, *A Dividend to Labor: A Study of Employer's Welfare Institutions* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899), pp. 3, 11, 13.

¹¹ Quoted in Gilman, *Dividend to Labour*, p. 17.

¹² Gilman, *Dividend to Labour*.

bulletin called *Social Service* and also issued a regular mimeographed letter to its commercial subscribers.¹³ Strong and Tolman gave frequent lectures on welfare and both men often wrote articles for popular publications. The Institute also provided consultation services, a research library, and on request recommended welfare personnel.¹⁴

It is impossible to determine the extent of the Institute's influence in promoting welfare but it counted among its paying clients some of the most important firms in the United States. These included Prudential Insurance, General Electric, McCormick Harvester, Sherwin-Williams, Curtis Publishing, Westinghouse, H. J. Heinz, and National Cash Register.¹⁵ Most of these firms began their welfare activities independent of the direct influence of Strong's Institute but they were provided with numerous suggestions for possible adoption. Furthermore, the Institute provided a valuable service in spreading the news to other firms and to the public.

Some of these same companies, along with many others, participated in the National Civic Federation's Welfare Department. The creation of a Welfare Department within the N.C.F. in 1904 was one of Marcus Hanna's last public acts. At its inaugural meeting the membership selected Herbert H. Vreeland (New York traction magnate) as Chairman. Its other officers included Cyrus H. McCormick, John Patterson (of National Cash Register), Edward A. Filene (of the Boston department store), and Cornelius N. Bliss (textile manufacturer and treasurer of the Republican Party).¹⁶ The Welfare Department differed from other Civic Federation departments in that it was exclusively a businessman's organization. In this way it could appeal to those employers who were ready to make improvements in the working conditions of their men but who were still unwilling to deal with union men, even on an informal basis.

Miss Gertrude Beeks headed the Civic Federation's welfare operations. She had been the first industrial betterment worker for the

¹³ Incomplete files of these publications may be found in the McCormick Collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society (McC. MSS.).

¹⁴ Tolman, *Social Engineering*, p. 44; Mary R. Cranston, "A Social Clearing House," *Harper's Monthly*, CXIII (June 1906), 142-7; S. M. Darling to W. H. Tolman, Jan. 27 1905, McC. MSS., Welfare, is a request for information on trade schools made under the company's commercial subscription.

¹⁵ American Institute of Social Service, Clients Outside New York City, Nov. 1, 1904; McC. MSS., Welfare.

¹⁶ "How the Welfare Department Was Organized," *NCF Monthly Review*, I (June, 1904), 13. Filene's Welfare Program was one of the most extensive in the nation, but he relied primarily on profit sharing to achieve his employees' good will. Edward Filene to Oscar Straus (Secretary of Commerce), Dec. 28, 1908, Dept. of Commerce—General Correspondence, File 67025, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Bliss was soon to resign as treasurer of the Republican Party due to charges made by Alton B. Parker in the 1904 campaign. He was charged with securing funds through irregular means.

McCormicks and had also worked for the Chicago Civic Federation.¹⁷ Her job brought her into contact with an average of fifty companies each year, advising them on the initiation of welfare systems, answering questions on specific programs, and recommending welfare managers.¹⁸ The Welfare Department under Miss Beeks' guidance became one of the most successful operations conducted by the Civic Federation.

The corporations already practising welfare provided a third source of information. National Cash Register publicized its activities over a wide area and answered frequent requests for advice or information. The company also encouraged tours through its newly-constructed factories.¹⁹ Edwin L. Shuey, N.C.R.'s first welfare superintendent, published a handbook on welfare for a series dedicated to "practical workers in church and philanthropy."²⁰ William E. C. Nazro, Plymouth Cordage's first welfare superintendent, was employed in an advisory capacity by the Civic Federation.²¹ There was also a great deal of interchange and sharing of ideas between corporations through correspondence, personal acquaintance, and the intermediate functions served by the American Institute of Social Service and the National Civic Federation.

Each of these institutions was represented by capable and highly-motivated reformers. Josiah Strong, William Tolman (his co-worker), Gertrude Beeks of the Civic Federation, and Edwin Shuey of National Cash Register all had strong feelings about the ethical value of welfare work. Strong was, of course, a minister of the social gospel. Tolman had been a relief worker and Beeks, a reformer. Shuey, a minister's son, was himself a prominent YMCA leader. Their own motivation was essentially humanitarian but they realized that they could not make a successful appeal to businessmen on that level alone. If an employer "doesn't appreciate the humanitarian standpoint," Miss Beeks said, "you can prove economy to him every time in increased efficiency and the greater permanence of employees through better health."²² "Unfavorable surroundings are not only evil," said Shuey, "but unbusiness-like; not only unnecessary, but bad policy."²³ The reformers adopted the

¹⁷ Sarah Comstock, "A Woman of Achievement: Miss Gertrude Beeks," *World's Work*, XXVI (Aug. 1913), 444-8.

¹⁸ Gordon M. Jensen, *The National Civic Federation: American Business in an Age of Social Change and Social Reform, 1900-1910* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton, 1956), p. 157.

¹⁹ William H. Tolman, *How a Manufacturing Concern Promotes Industrial Hygiene* (Washington, D.C.: International Congress of Hygiene and Demography, 1912), pamphlet.

²⁰ Edwin L. Shuey, *Factory People and Their Employers* (New York: Tentilhon & Co., 1900).

²¹ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Ropemakers of Plymouth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), p. 91.

²² Comstock, "Woman of Achievement."

²³ Shuey, *Factory People*, p. 13.

language of the businessmen as their own, but it was also congenial because the rhetoric of scientific organization and efficiency had become an article of faith for middle-class progressivism.

"If I were asked to characterize the National Cash Register Company in a word," said Tolman, "it would be — Efficiency; all-around, lasting Efficiency, planned not for a day, but for a lifetime; not the Efficiency of the tool or the machine, the thing — but of the man and woman — the workers themselves."²⁴ Rationalization and Efficiency had become the watchwords of American industry. Constant efforts were being made to increase the efficiency of production through improvement of machinery and by the horizontal and vertical integration of industry. Competition in domestic and foreign markets compelled a constant search for faster, cheaper, and improved methods of production, but mechanical improvements alone were not enough in and of themselves. It was necessary to rationalize the human elements of the industrial process as well as the machines.

The reformers regarded efficiency as a correct emphasis for welfare programming. Graham Taylor, one of the leading settlement house workers and director of the Chicago Commons, opened one conference by declaring that the purpose of welfare work was "to increase industrial efficiency." "American industries," he continued, "depend more and more upon the promotion of industrial and mercantile efficiency to take and keep their lead in the world's market."²⁵ These were words that the business community could understand; reform and the drive for efficiency were compatible partners.

John Patterson, president of the National Cash Register Company of Dayton, Ohio, viewed welfare as one of the prime methods of combatting labor turnover. Mobility, dissatisfaction, illness, and death contributed to the steady stream of workers flowing in and out of the factories. Vreeland characterized welfare work as an asset in retaining "a permanent set of employees as against a constantly-changing force which requires effort to train, and necessitates the loss of much material wasted."²⁶ The need to hold a body of trained workers was, of course, most crucial in those industries employing a high proportion of skilled or semi-skilled labor. A Department of Labor study in 1919 supported

²⁴ William H. Tolman, *How a Manufacturing Concern*.

²⁵ Minutes of the Conference on Welfare Work, first meeting, April 1, 1906, McC. MSS., Welfare.

²⁶ Minutes of the Conference on Welfare Work, fifth meeting, May 1, 1906, McC. MSS., Welfare. Report of Gertrude Beeks, July 1901, in Nettie Fowler McCormick MSS. Miss Beeks' report is a survey of her findings on a nationwide tour in which she investigated welfare work practices in leading enterprises. Herbert H. Vreeland, *Welfare Work*, A speech delivered before the New England Cotton Manufacturers Assoc., Sept. 20, 1905, (New York: National Civic Federation, 1905), pamphlet.

this case for welfare. They found that in 431 firms engaged in welfare work, a noticeable decrease in turnover was reported by 136 of them.²⁷

Employers also evinced a general concern with the problem of alienation as plants grew larger and industries combined. In the old days, said one large employer, "I knew every man. . . . If anybody had a grievance he could come in to see the 'old man' and the door was always open. When I left the active management . . . we had . . . some thirty thousand employees, and the men who worked . . . would have stood just about as much chance to get in to see anyone with his grievance as he would to get into the Kingdom of Heaven."²⁸ At National Cash Register, Patterson found that increasing volume of production was not enough. The return of too many machines with mechanical defects injured the firm's reputation and obliterated its profits. This experience was a major reason for the development of N.C.R.'s welfare program.²⁹ Welfare work was not the only cure for alienation, nor the best one, but it probably represented one of the earliest conscious attempts of the employers to deal with the problem.

Employers who adopted welfare programs did not, of course, neglect the impact it might have in fighting trade unionism and radicalism. Heinz Foods attributed the success of their welfare plan to an open shop policy. The National Cash Register program was, at least in part, a response to severe labor unrest in the Dayton factory.³⁰ There is little reason to doubt that when other employers thought about welfare they considered the advantages they might gain *vis-à-vis* the trade unions. This does not mean, however, that antipathy toward trade unions constituted the exclusive, or even the dominant factor in their decision to develop a welfare program.

Many, perhaps most of the employers who put welfare plans into operation did so because they believed it was the "right" thing to do. Samuel Eliot Morison, the distinguished Harvard historian, declared that his old friend Augustus Peabody Loring, president of the Plymouth Cordage Company, was motivated by "natural benevolence, and his recognition of the essential worth of the working man."³¹ Henry Heinz,

²⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Welfare Work for Employees in Industrial Establishments in the United States* (Washington: G.P.O., 1919), p. 13.

²⁸ Jensen, *National Civic Federation*, p. 83.

²⁹ Samuel Crowther, *John H. Patterson: Pioneer in Industrial Welfare* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page Co., 1923).

³⁰ Report of Gertrude Beeks, Nettie F. McC. MSS.; Stanley McCormick N.C.R. Memo, McC. MSS., Welfare; Lena Harvey Tracy, *How My Heart Sang* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1950), pp. 138-9.

³¹ Morison, *Ropemakers of Plymouth*, pp. 91, 92, 95. Professor Morison comments that a cynic or a Marxian would attribute the program to a desire "to keep the proletariat contented with low wages." I do not doubt Mr. Loring's goodness, but there is much to be said for the views of cynics and Marxians on welfare work.

said his former secretary, did it because it was right or, according to his son, through "Heart Power." Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones tried to follow the Golden Rule in his factory. The more sophisticated John Patterson believed that all men must be "stewards of their wealth, of progress, and reform."³² While there is some room for cynicism in analyzing their declared purposes, one must not make the mistake of confusing the doctrine of Christian stewardship in which they believed with altruism.

There was no necessary contradiction between exhibiting a social concern within their businesses and the hope to profit from it at the same time. These employers did not believe that good works would be rewarded in heaven alone. There were rewards to be gained in the here and now. Heinz welfare work produced a corporate image of clean, pure factories that probably contributed to the sales of all 57 varieties of canned foods.³³ Sam Jones advised his more benighted contemporaries that "those who are looking at the mere material side of the question will be pleased to know that it pays in sordid dollars and cents."³⁴ A French observer of American industrial welfare work accurately noted that the employer's motivation could be summed up in the maxim — "It pays to do good."³⁵

The employee lunch room was one of the most widespread of the new welfare work installations. Although ostensibly designed merely to give the worker a cheap, hot meal at noon hour, the lunch rooms also served the employers' purposes. "What and how the industrial army eats," Tolman told the nation's employers, "is of the first importance to them."³⁶ He might have cited the old adage, "An army travels on its stomach." The well-fed industrial army was an efficient one. The lunch room delivered the worker from his dependence on his lunch pail with its assortment of cold leftovers or, still worse, that hallowed institution — the free lunch at the corner saloon. Obviously, the employers preferred workers who were not half-inebriated for their afternoon's work.

³² Report of Gertrude Beeks; Tracy, *How My Heart Sang*, p. 117; E. E. McCafferty, *Henry J. Heinz* (New York: Bartlett Orr Press, 1923), pp. 129-34; Samuel Jones to unknown, June 27, 1899, quoted in Olmstead, *Betterment of Industrial Conditions*, pp. 1136-7.

³³ Stanley McCormick N.C.R. Memo, McC. MSS., Welfare; Homer J. Hagedorn, "A Note on the Motivation of Personnel Management: Industrial Welfare 1885-1910," *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, X (April 1958), 134-9.

³⁴ Olmstead, *Betterment of Industrial Conditions*, pp. 1136-7.

³⁵ "A French Writer on the 'Social Engineer' in America," *Review of Reviews*, XL (July 1909), 90-1. The writer is identified as M. Georges Benoit-Levy writing in *La Revue*.

³⁶ W. H. Tolman, *Social Engineering: A Record of Things Done by American Industrialists Employing Upwards of One and One-Half Million of People* (New York: McGraw Publishing Co., 1909), p. 51.

Landscape gardening was another favorite innovation of the welfare workers. N.C.R. entrusted the rehabilitation and beautification of its factory grounds to a landscaping firm which had been founded by Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Central Park. "All this gardening," said an N.C.R. spokesman, "has been kept up on the principle that beautiful surroundings make happy people and that happiness is always conducive to increased production." Sam Jones established a Golden Rule Park outside his factory, for he believed that it had an "elevating, moralizing effect" on his men who could look out the factory windows upon their gracious surroundings. Beautification of the factory grounds was often, in addition, a wise investment since it enhanced the value of the company's and surrounding property.³⁷

National Cash Register also sponsored an extensive gardening program for their workers and the neighborhood children. Patterson believed that gardening had an "uplifting" effect on the individual and improved his physical well-being. The children, he hoped, would learn order, system, care, and self-reliance. "While a man works in his garden," added Tolman, "he is not in the saloon." Garden products might also supplement the worker's income, a fact of some considerable importance to employers interested in their wages' bill.³⁸

Landscaping and gardening programs were carried out by the factories partly because of an old dream and in response to a new problem. This old dream was the belief that man was personally improved by contact with nature and fresh air. Urbanization was the new problem. City living, according to the myth, bred many vices and reduced the once-independent artisan to a brutalized proletarian. The proper solution was to maintain progress and the factory system while re-introducing the purifying qualities of nature into the life of the workingman.³⁹

Educational programs were organized by many of the corporations. A high proportion of the classes and lectures involved job training. In other cases, rich cultural programs were offered. Some companies gave courses for the wives and children of their work force. Plymouth Cordage offered the women a domestic science course. There they could learn to prepare inexpensive meals and help make the most out of their husband's wages. Kindergartens were conducted by N.C.R. and other companies for the children of their workers. N.C.R.'s president

³⁷ Olmstead, *Betterment of Industrial Conditions*, pp. 1136-7. Nazro and Tolman were both readers of Ruskin and Professor Morrison believes that Ruskin was a major influence on Nazro's work.

³⁸ Tolman, "What More Than Wages?"; Tolman, *How a Manufacturing Concern*, p. 7.

³⁹ The garden city movement was another solution to this problem. Olmstead planned Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, for one steel company and one might consider the greenbelt villages of the New Deal era as a later offspring of this movement.

Patterson thought his kindergarten would teach its pupils an unexcelled efficiency in the use of hands and brains. The little hands would gain superior dexterity, and ultimately he hoped to employ only those who had gone through his kindergarten program.⁴⁰

A good share of the reformers' energy went into convincing the factory owners that better toilet facilities, washbasins, showers, and lockers would be appreciated by their workers. The pages of the pamphlets and books on welfare work were almost all liberally sprinkled with pictures of the modern sanitary facilities offered by progressive factories. In advocating the installation of decent toilets, C. W. Price of the McCormick Company suggested: "Welfare work should be applied to the most pressing needs first." N.C.R. and the Sherwin-Williams Company were convinced that cleanliness and order raised the standards and hence the efficiency of their employees. It was Tolman of the Institute for Social Service, however, who offered the most far-reaching argument for such facilities: "As it is acknowledged that habitual bathing prevents disease and promotes health and morality, baths for working people affect all classes of society."⁴¹

Recreational opportunities, including gymnasiums and athletic fields, were provided in many welfare programs. The improvement of the worker's body may have had an immediate utility for an industrial enterprise, and Tolman saw other benefits that might be derived. "Every minute," he said, "that your boys and men spend in such a way keeps them out of the saloon, with its possibilities of unfitting your employees to do a healthy day's work on the morrow, whereby your business suffers. Then, too, the knowledge, on the part of the women of the family, that you have done this, will be a conservative force, used on your side in the event of a strike or a disposition on the part of the men to any kind of action that will hurt our interests."⁴²

There were many other aspects of welfare work, some vital, others trivial. One welfare expert gave a high priority to proper ventilation, good lighting, and emergency medical facilities. At the other extreme, another welfare advocate praised the imagination of one employer who showed pictures of his hunting trips to entertain his workers. For the most part, the installation of facilities and services connected with welfare work were worthwhile and beneficial to the workingmen, regardless of the potential benefits for the employers. The accomplishments

⁴⁰ Morison, *Ropemakers*, p. 94; Welfare Department of the National Civic Federation, *Conference on Welfare Work* (New York: A. H. Kellogg Co., 1904), pp. 16, 103; "The Connection of Kindergarten and Factory," *The N.C.R.*, XII (July 15, 1900), 341.

⁴¹ Report of Gertrude Beeks; Tolman, "What More Than Wages?"; Tolman, *Social Engineering*, p. 56; "Welfare work should be applied to the most pressing needs first," in McC. MSS., Welfare.

⁴² Tolman, *Social Engineering*, p. 268.

of the welfare work movement were certainly not inconsiderable when measured against the practices of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, there was great opposition to welfare work among large sections of the American employers. The Pillsbury-Washburn Company of Minneapolis believed "that severe discipline and no industrial betterment work was the only way to handle labor."⁴³ Charles W. Post, the cereal manufacturer, was explicitly vigorous in his condemnation of welfare work. Those who tried it, he said, "learned to their cost that patronizing and coddling grown men and women is not looked favorably upon by the Infinite Power which governs us all. . . . It is intended by the Creator that mankind obtain 'welfare' as the result of service and often-times hard service. It is not to be fed to him in a silver spoon and his chin held up while he takes it."⁴⁴ Post and Pillsbury were representative of what was probably the great majority of American employers of the time. Those firms continued the nineteenth century's laissez-faire practices, but they were a majority in the process of becoming a minority.

Some union men supported industrial betterment work; others were suspicious of the employers' motives, and these included the president of the American Federation of Labor. The advertising of welfare work disturbed Samuel Gompers, who bitterly attacked one gross example:

For instance, . . . the International Harvester Company seriously and complacently affirmed: 'The drinking water is everywhere pure.' This astounding good deed of the International Harvester Company perhaps merits public commendation.⁴⁵

An attack in the form of some doggerel published by the Trade Union Educational League in 1926 indicated that the employers' old habits persisted:

<p>Sing a song of "Welfare," A pocket full of tricks; To soothe the weary workers, When he groans or kicks. If he asks for shorter hours, Or for better pay, Little stunts of "Welfare," Turn his thoughts away.</p>	<p>Sing a song of "Welfare," Forty 'leven kinds, Elevate your morals, Cultivate your minds. Kindergartens, nurses, Bathtubs, books, and flowers, Anything but better pay, Or shorter working hours.⁴⁶</p>
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American labor's adverse reaction to industrial betterment work was probably due to two considerations. One factor was the obvious

⁴³ Report of Gertrude Beeks.

⁴⁴ L. W. Post to W. H. Tolman (no date) in Tolman, *Social Engineering*, p. 364.

⁴⁵ Sullivan, *Trade Union's Attitude*, p. 6; Lavey, *Welfare Work*; Jensen, *National Civic Federation*, pp. 155-7; Samuel Gompers, "The Good and Bad of 'Welfare Work'," *American Federationist*, XX (Dec. 1913), 1041-3.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Dunn, *Company Unions* (Chicago: TUEL, 1926), p. 2.

unwillingness of most of the firms with welfare plans to deal with the trade unions. The second reason was organized labor's distaste for paternalism. In a few cases employers established consultative committees among their workingmen. This did not, however, alter the fact that the form and limits of welfare benefits were decided by management without negotiation or consultation with trade unions. One result of labor's reaction was that the terms "welfare" and "industrial betterment" fell into disuse and almost disappeared by 1920.⁴⁷ The welfare manager came to be called the employment manager and then the term personnel manager was substituted, but, of course, the new terminology did not serve to stir labor's enthusiasm for the work done in its name.

Despite such opposition, welfare had assumed an important place in American industry. In a survey made during 1916-17 the Bureau of Labor Statistics located 431 companies, employing over 1,500,000 men, which practised some form of welfare work. One hundred and forty-one of these firms employed a welfare secretary or employment manager.⁴⁸ It was from this base that the entire system of personnel management in American industry would develop.

This study of the employer welfare movement raises problems for both the Wiebe and Kolko models of the progressive period. Traditional interpretations of progressivism emphasize the role of middle-class reformers. Gabriel Kolko's work stands progressivism on its head and argues that the period was basically conservative and dominated by big business. Furthermore, progressive regulatory legislation was designed by big business, in its own interest, and reflected the class character of American society. Robert Wiebe differs from Kolko in two important respects. Firstly, Wiebe stresses divisions within the business community which Kolko properly minimizes, since there is, after all, a difference between an Indiana carriage manufacturer and the House of Morgan. Secondly, Wiebe considers the businessmen to be progressives only because they accepted one of the three basic objectives of the movement — the regulation of the economy in the public interest.

Many important businessmen were not, in any meaningful sense of the term, "conservative," nor was their progressivism restricted to regulatory legislation which fulfilled their competitive needs. Kolko's

⁴⁷ Public Archives of Canada, Mackenzie King Papers, vol. 32, Ivy L. Lee to C. J. Hicks, Jan. 11, 1916. Lee realized that the term was damaging to public relations work and suggested that Hicks "forever abolish the use of the word 'welfare'."

⁴⁸ Mary R. Cranston, "The Social Secretary — An Opportunity for Employer and Employee to Understand Each Other," *The Craftsman*, X (July 1906), 489-93; Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Welfare Work*, p. 123; Hagedorn, "A Note on Motivation," claims that welfare work was prevalent only in light industries but the BLS survey included 49 foundries and machine shops, 40 iron and steel producers, and 12 coal mining companies.

problem is not merely one of semantics. When he fastens the conservative label to the businessman of the progressive period he obscures the process of change in American life. Anything short of revolution is excluded from his model of social change. Kolko fails to see that the businessman did undergo a meaningful change, even if there was no basic alteration in the American social structure. The employer welfare movement marks the turn from laissez-faire to the businessman's acceptance of modern corporate liberalism. That group of American employers which participated in the industrial betterment movement rapidly assimilated the ideology of the middle-class reformers, and, contrary to Wiebe's formulation, this new faith was expressed in a number of areas of American life. These employers might participate in the politics of progressivism, as did Sam Jones or George W. Perkins, but the major focus for reform was their own factory, and employer welfare was the corporate expression of progressivism.

The industrial betterment movement provided but one of the meeting grounds for the businessman and the middle-class reformer. Yet the case under consideration shows that the historian of progressivism cannot dismiss the army of progressive characters created by Faulkner, Mowry, and Hofstadter. The middle-class reformer now rejoins the progressive legions, but no longer as their leader. He occupies a new role as ideological guide for the corporate leaders. In a later day, Mackenzie King assumed this role for the Rockefellers. The point is, then, that the history of American progressivism cannot be written from the vantage point of either businessman or reformer, but must seek to comprehend the nature of their relationship. Progressivism in industry marked neither the triumph of conservatism nor a victory for reform. It was, rather, the first of a series of trysts which would ultimately develop into the comfortable but subtle relationship between the reformer and the corporation which is the essence of twentieth-century liberalism.